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ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study is to demonstrate experimentally which of three methods--lecture, shaping, or sensitivity--is most effective in improving empathic communication between black and white students. The trainees consisted of 88 undergraduates randomly divided into four groups. The lecture, the sensitivity, and the shaping methods were all found to have variable effects, none of which was significant. The lecture method appeared least effective while the sensitivity and shaping methods were more effective; however, the control group improved in the same patterns as did the experimental groups. (Author)

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Developing Empathic Communication Between Races- Lecture, Shaping And Sensitivity Models

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Developing Empathic Communication Between Races: Lecture, Shaping And Sensitivity Methods

Purpose:

The primary purpose of this study was to experimentally demonstrate which of three methods--lecture, shaping, or sensitivity--is most effective in improving empathic communication between black and white students. A secondary purpose of this study was to examine styles of human relations training and their effect on outcomes of training and a third purpose was to examine the measures that are available to researchers to demonstrate how training has or has not been effective.

Effective communication between persons appears more critically needed today in a variety of human relationships than ever before: Person to person, professional helper to helpee, and between black and white. In the field of counseling, empathy has been found to be an important variable in helpful communication between persons and in therapeutic effectiveness--and indeed may be an important variable in other human relationships (e.g., Carkhuff & Truax, 1967).

In a review of the literature empathic responsiveness was found highly related to the ability to communicate effectively (Gompertz, 1960). In education, more empathic teachers' classes showed greater significant gains in reading achievement than those of less empathic teachers (Aspy, 1965).

"Empathy" has been defined as the "ability to structure the world as another person sees it" and includes this as the counselor's task, to "feel, to react, and to interpret the counselee's world as he sees it" (Buchheimer et al, 1965).

Another characteristic related to counselor effectiveness is open-mindedness, which reduces the counselor's need to distort other persons' meanings, makes

him more aware of his own reactions to stimuli, and reduces his feeling of threat and anxiety (Mezzano, 1969; Milliken & Patterson, 1967; Rokeach, 1960, Russo et al, 1964).

Empathy and openness appear to be desirable qualities in many human relationships and are essential in helping or counseling relationships. Both characteristics would appear desirable in effective communication between whites and blacks in our country. Race does seem to be a factor in empathic communication (Banks et al, 1967).

Despite the apparent urgent need for a systematic investigation of the effective ingredients in counseling and other relationships, the inadequacy of such research has been stressed by numerous periodic reviewers of the field (e.g. Rothrey and Farwell, 1960; Sprague, 1966; Thoresen, 1969). The especially urgent need for research in counseling blacks and other minorities and the meagerness of such research has been stressed by other reviewers (Smallenburg & Smallenburg, 1968). The review of studies cited earlier suggests that the variables of empathy and openness should be studied in a systematic way.

In addition to the problem of selecting the variables related to effective communication, another is whether these skills or characteristics can be taught.

Three major educational approaches would be most relevant in developing these human relations skills. The first is the traditional classroom method, in which the teacher presents the material to the group, frequently using questions and discussions (hereafter referred to as the Lecture Method). A second is the purposeful teaching of skills, particularly skills involving clear behavioral components, by demonstration, practice, imitation, and feedback (Shaping Method). A third is the group experience which provides participants with greater awareness of themselves and others. This method has developed from T-groups developed by the National Testing Laboratory of the National Educational Association (NTL Institute for Applied Behavioral Science, 1970), and has been used by educators and aroused much controversy (Silberman, 1970) (hereafter called the Sensitivity Method).

A more recent study (Lieberman, Yalom and Miles, 1973) suggested that the crucial variable in encounter groups is the effectiveness of the leader in leadership qualities, not his theoretical orientation. On their Composite Change Index of encounter group effectiveness they found that about a third of their participants showed positive changes right after their Group session, about a

third showed no change and the remaining third negative changes.

It would seem then that measures of Empathy, communication, and group leader variance, all contribute to group outcomes. The investigators believe that if one could demonstrate an effective way of increasing empathy we would then be able to show that one method or training style was effectively more beneficial to improving communications between races than any other. The study was in fact motivated in part by our interest in empathy as a variable in communication and also by the amount of energy, time, and money being spent by human behavior specialists on that single variable,"Human Relations Training".

Method

This was a voluntary study whose subjects were paid for their participation.[3] One hundred students were pre-screened for their willingness (1) to cooperate in a 25-hour research study and (2) their availability over a concentrated period of time. The subjects were randomly

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[3] Grant funded by the Research Foundation of City University of New York

placed into race and sex categories. The number of subjects (see table I) and their ethnic and demographic distributions were available. At the conclusion of training and testing, eighty-eight subjects remained. They were then divided into four groups. Originally the design of the study was to employ three different training methods; Sensitivity, Shaping, Lecture, and also a control group. The early results of the study showed that the control group was not a "control group"; the participants in this group attempted to discern the nature of the experiment and individuals attempted to lead the group on the basis of their expectations. The original notion of our control group was to take one quarter of the participants in the experiment and to ask them to remain together for a period of twenty-five hours and not to tell them that they were a control group, but that they were just another variable in the experiment. However, it became apparent that friends in other groups were informing some members of the control group about what was going on in their groups. Therefore the control group was no longer a pure control group because they had been contaminated by the nature of the experiment. In effect, it became a leaderless group dedicated to the same goals--that is something about black-white relationships. There-

fore, for the purposes of this particular study, the control group will be considered a fourth experimental group.

Method

Because of the variability of the understanding of the terms used in this study, it is important for us to completely define our goals and our meanings of the words:

1. Lecture. In this method, the nature of effective communication, helping skills, helper and helpee characteristics are presented to trainees by a trainer who resembles an Instructor who lectures, answers and asks questions, and also leads discussions.

2. Shaping. Specific communication skills are learned by trainees in step-by-step progressions (Carkhuff & Banks, 1970, Ivey et al, 1968). Trainees learn these skills by demonstration, role-playing, practice, and feedback methods.

3. Sensitivity. In this procedure, trainees are helped by a group leader to better understand themselves and others by participating in group experience.

We felt that the extreme variability in tech-

niques associated with the methods would make it impossible to completely define the activities within the groups without defining the activities of the individual group leaders who were performing and using these methods. The trainers were experts in their training methods, considered so by peer judges in their respective fields. Videotapes of training sessions were examined by experts and found to be consistent with method goals. Therefore, for this study we accepted the trainers' definitions of their particular methods. It should be noted that in this study all three trainers were black and have had extensive experience in the methods outlined. They were all recognized human relations trainers. The authors were participant observers in the three groups that were video-taped.

Trainees

The trainees consisted of a total of eighty-eight undergraduate students, paid volunteers, randomly subdivided into four groups with each group consisting of blacks and whites, males and females.

Measurement Procedures

The testing instruments were the following:

1. Index of Communication. This measure consisted of subjects' written responses to standard helpee expression, giving a summed score of the subjects' empathy ability.

2. Index of Racial Communication. This measure consisted of subjects' written responses to standard helpee racial expressions, giving a summed score of the subjects' racial empathic ability.

3. Index of Discrimination. This measure consisted of subjects' selecting one of four responses to standard helpee expressions, giving an empathy score of agreement with experts' ratings.

4. Index of Racial Discrimination. This measure consisted of the subjects selecting one of four responses to standard racial helpee expressions, giving an empathy score of agreement with experts' ratings.

The above four measures were those used and described by Carkhuff and Banks (1970). Each of these measures consisted of taped recordings of helpee expressions, with pauses for subjects to respond open-endedly in writing to the Communication and Racial Communication items and with an opportunity to select one of four helper responses of the Discrimination and Racial Discrimination

items. For each of these measures, there were eight helper expressions for the pre-test and eight different items in the alternate form post-test.

5. Open-mindedness versus closed-mindedness. Rokeach's Dogmatism Scale (Rokeach, 1960). A paper and pencil test was the measure of this variable.

Design

The groups met for a total of twenty hours. Pre- and post-testing of experimental and control subjects was arranged prior to and after the training period. A split-half alternative form was used for the Carkhuff and Banks measures. The Dogmatism Scale was administered twice.

Hypotheses

We assumed that empathic communication skills and openness are qualities that are not only desirable but modifiable. Although individuals differ in their initial qualities of these skills and characteristics, training will modify them.

Specifically, the following null hypotheses were made:

(a) There will be no difference among the four

groups in measured gains of empathy and openness.

(b) There will be no differences among measures of empathy and subject self-reporting.

Testing of Hypotheses

Statistical techniques, including analysis of variance and multiple repression correlation, enable us to make comparisons between experimental training and no training, and among the training methods, and also to assess the effects of training on the trainees. (Elmer Struening, Ph.D., was the statistical consultant for this project.) The inter rater reliability of the Communication and Racial Communication Scales designed by Carkhuff and Banks was -82.

Results

In the analyses of variance for the five measures used in this study, three showed significant pre-post changes (Dogmatism, Table I; Communication, Table III; and Racial Discrimination, Table IX). Significant changes by groups were found for two measures, Communication and Racial Communication (Table VII). For Discrimination, Table V, no significant changes were found in the analysis of variance.

Examination of the Dogmatism scores (Table IV) revealed that the greatest change was for the control group which became less dogmatic (10 points). This finding should be interpreted as a trend, as the overall analysis of variance indicated no significant change by groups, although pre-post change was significant (at the .03 level). Except for the Lecture group, the trend revealed less dogmatism for the Shaping and Sensitivity groups, though not as great as for the Control group.

Examination of the Communication means (Table IV) for which the analysis of variance revealed both pre-post changes (at the .001 level) and changes by groups (at the .001 level) showed that the Lecture mean change increased (1.28) while the other groups showed decreases. This would indicate that except for the Lecture group, subjects in the three other groups decreased in their ability to make empathic responses.

The overall significant pre-post change for Racial Discrimination (Table IX) was significant, and an examination of the mean changes by groups (Table X) revealed that all had greater mean scores: This meant for Racial Discrimination that the combined four groups of subjects became less able to select more empathic

racial items. Since change by groups was not significant, each group's decreasing racial empathy should be interpreted as trends.

For Racial Communication (Table VIII) the Lecture group hardly changed (.11 increase) while the Shaping and Sensitivity groups showed some increase in communicating racial empathy. However, the Control group showed a decline.

Examining the data, by groups, we find that the Lecture group showed slight changes on all five measures. The Control group showed a decrease in dogmatism. The Shaping group became slightly less dogmatic, decreased in their ability for general empathic communication, increased in ability to make empathic racial communication statements, with very slight changes for discrimination and racial discrimination. The Sensitivity group showed a decrease in dogmatism but decreased in ability to empathically communicate, or discriminate, among racial communication statements.

Discussion

The results of this research are inconclusive. The reasons for this are at the same time both complex and fundamental to this area of research and inquiry.

The overall results suggest that the methods used for changing empathy may in some instances have negative effects or no effect at all.

The authors believe that the Carkhuff measures employed may not be the best measures of empathy. The research by Chinsky and Rappaport (1970) has questioned the reliability of these measures. Racial communication, racial discrimination, communication and discrimination are complex variables. Carkhuff's measures seem to be a beginning step towards an understanding of this kind of behavior, but at this time we feel that they have serious weaknesses.

A second major problem is the essentially unstandardized nature of the training methods. There are innumerable lecture, shaping, and sensitivity approaches and techniques. While care was taken in this study to insure consistent and replicable training procedures, other researchers could conceivably and justifiably design other approaches under the same rubric. For example, some "lecture" methods may resemble group dynamics sessions, while some "sensitivity" methods may resemble lectures. This is not only a weakness in our design but also a reflection of the state of the "art" in training methodology.

The third major problem is the variable of the trainer. Limitations in research funds and resources resulted in our using only one trainer for each method, leaving uncontrolled the trainer variable. Our earlier reference to Lieberman et al (1973) study of seventeen groups indicates the leader and not his method is the crucial variable.

A fourth problem is the absence of a control group, which was mentioned earlier. The control group was found through statistical analyses to have few differences with the experimental group. This brings us to the whole area of leaving people alone and giving them an assignment as opposed to training leaders to perform some sort of task. The control group data would suggest that the outcomes of human relations training may be based upon the goals of the members of the group rather than the inputs of the leaders. It is interesting to note that on a self-report scale which the subjects were asked to take, the three original experimental groups thought they had changed dramatically while the control group thought nothing had happened to them. Yet, on statistical measures, the amount of change for the control group was just as dramatic as for the other three groups. The researchers

believe that the desire of group members to let group leaders know they have improved is dramatic and would seem to be more dramatic evidence of change than actual improvement on statistical and more objective measures.

Summary

This research was based upon the notion that communication between races has at its fundamental core the notion of empathy, and that if, in fact, empathy can be shown to be improved, then perhaps we can find a way of improving communications between races. Three methods were employed to discover whether one was more effective in improving empathic communication. The Lecture, the Sensitivity, and the Shaping methods were all found to have variable effects, none of them at the significant level. Trends seem to indicate that the lecture method was least effective and the sensitivity and shaping methods were more effective. However, an interesting finding in this study was that the control group improved in the same trends as the experimental groups. The researchers realize that some parts of this design, particularly the measures, may be weak indicators of the desired results, however, the trends are significant, not only for much of the

research that is being done in this field, but also for the whole area of human relations training which seems to be going on at a dramatically lively pace without ever stopping to examine what training is for and what results are desired.

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Table I

Analysis of Variance For Dogmatism Scores

Source	SS	DF	Mean sq.	F-test	Sig
Groups	1044.53	3	348.18	0.23	over .50
Within groups	113293.13	74	1530.00	not tested	
Pre-post change	813.14	1	813.14	4.81*	0.03
Change by groups	659.57	3	219.86	1.30	
Change by Ss	12498.96	74	168.91	not tested	
Total	128309.25	155	827.80		

Table II

Table Of Means For Dogmatism Scores

Group	Pre-test	Post-test	Mean of pre & post scores
Lecture	141.71[1]	142.79	142.25[3]
	(14[2])	(14)	29.08[4]
Control	149.72	139.80	144.76
	(25)	(25)	31.97
Shaping	147.43	144.76	155.10
	(21)	(21)	25.83
Sensitivity	153.17	146.00	149.58
	(18)	(18)	21.40

[1] Mean

[2] Number of subjects

[3] Average mean of pre and post groups

[4] Standard deviation

Table III

Analysis Of Variance For Communication Scores

Source	SS	DF	Mean sq.	F-test	Sig
Groups	108.90	3	36.30	2.03	.12
Within groups	1326.25	74	17.92	not tested	
Pre-post change	136.43	1	136.43	23.42***	Under .001
Change by groups	128.40	3	42.80	7.35***	Under .001
Change by Ss	431.08	74	5.83	not tested	
Total	2131.07	155	13.75		

Table IV

Table Of Means For Communication Scores

Group	Pre-test	Post-test	Mean of pre & post test
Lecture	15.29	16.57	15.93
	(14)	(14)	2.41
Control	19.38	16.70	18.04
	(25)	(25)	2.99
Shaping	19.55	16.43	17.99
	(21)	(21)	3.28
Sensitivity	18.72	15.58	17.15
	(18)	(18)	3.05

Table V

Analysis Of Variance For Discrimination Scores

Source	SS	DF	Mean sq.	F-test	Sig
Groups	0.21	3	0.07	1.94	0.13
Within groups	2.64	74	0.04	not tested	
Pre-post change	.007	1	0.007	0.28	over 0.50
Change by groups	.099	3	0.03	1.40	over 0.25
Change by Ss	1.75	74	0.02	not tested	
Total	4.71	155	0.03		

Table VI

Table Of Means For Discrimination Scores

Group	Pre-test	Post-test	Mean of pre & post test
Lecture	1.20	1.23	1.22
	(14)	(14)	0.13
Control	1.21	1.14	1.18
	(25)	(25)	0.15
Shaping	1.19	1.13	1.16
	(21)	(21)	0.12
Sensitivity	1.23	1.28	1.26
	(18)	(18)	0.13

Table VII

Analysis Of Variance For Racial Communication Scores

Source	SS	DF	Mean sq.	F-test	Sig
Groups	97.06	3	32.35	3.11*	0.03
Within groups	769.17	74	10.39	not tested	
Pre-post change	6.14	1	6.14	1.36	0.25
Change by groups	51.47	3	17.16	3.79*	0.01
Change by Ss	355.45	74	4.53	not tested	
Total	1259.29	155	8.12	-	

Table VIII

Table Of Means For Racial Communication Scores

Group	Pre-test	Post-test	Mean of pre & post test
Lecture	13.96	14.07	14.02
	(14)	(14)	1.65
Control	15.08	13.78	14.43
	(25)	(25)	2.11
Shaping	14.65	16.57	15.61
	(21)	(21)	3.08
Sensitivity	15.53	16.42	15.97
	(18)	(18)	1.77

Table IX

Analysis Of Variance For Racial Discrimination Scores

Source	SS	DF	Mean sq.	F-test	Sig
Groups	0.15	3	0.05	0.96	0.52
Within groups	3.90	74	0.05	not tested	
Pre-post change	1.79	1	1.79	69.477***	under .001
Change by groups	0.18	3	0.06	2.31	0.08
Change by Ss	1.90	74	0.03	not tested	
Total	7.92	155	0.05		

Table X

Table Of Means For Racial Discrimination Scores

Group	Pre-test	Post-test	Mean of pre & post test
Lecture	1.06	1.16	1.11
	(14)	(14)	0.25
Control	1.04	1.29	1.16
	(25)	(25)	0.15
Shaping	0.97	1.19	1.08
	(21)	(21)	0.13
Sensitivity	0.96	1.25	1.10
	(18)	(18)	0.13

Table XI

Subjects Description of Changes as the Result of the Experiment

Category	Sensitivity Group	Lecture Group	Shaping Group	Control Group
1. Self-Awareness	2	7	5	2
2. Awareness of Others	8	11	3	3
3. Self-Acceptance	0	4	5	0
4. Acceptance of others	14	5	5	1
5. Ability to Relate	3	3	6	0
6. Honest & Open Communication	4	8	7	1
7. Ability to Trust and Show one's feelings	2	1	1	0
8. Change in Attitudes	4	0	1	0
9. Ability to Listen rather than hear	1	1	4	0
10. Tolerance and understanding between races	1	1	1	0
11. Recognition of similarities between People	2	3	2	1

Table XI con't.

Subjects Description of Changes as the Result of the Experiment

Category	Sensitivity Group	Lecture Group	Shaping Group	Control Group
12. Attune oneself to Nonverbal as well as Verbal Communication	1	1	0	0
Total	42	45	40	8